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ABSTRACT

This paper, outlining the present goals, purposes and future role of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (ILLAEYC), discusses what is involved in providing high quality programs for young children everywhere, not only in Illinois. Among ILLAEYC's objectives: (1) to provide a channel of information for people working with young children; (2) to maintain a close watch on the standards, quality and availability of services offered to young children; (3) to develop positions as a State group on the proper priorities in terms of young children's needs; and (4) to foster strong working relationships with other groups concerned with young children. To achieve high quality programs, there must be eye-to-eye contact and intensive interaction with each child, and there must be time for reflection on each day's activities. The educator's primary responsibility is the quality of day-to-day encounters of individual adults with individual children. By concentrating on this approach, educators can achieve two goals simultaneously: provide high quality service to children and impress (rather than pressure) those who seek counsel on education programs for young children. (AJ)

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TEACHING THE YOUNG CHILD: GOALS FOR ILLINOIS

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Based on a speech presented at the First Annual Conference of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (ILLAEYC) May 15, 1971. Washington School, Champaign, Illinois.

On this occasion of the first annual state conference of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children, I would like to talk in a general way about the goals and purposes of the organization, and to sketch out an approach toward its future role in the lives of young children in our state.

One of our major objectives in forming the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children has been to provide a channel for information, for support, ideas, knowledge and inspiration for all of us in the State of Illinois whose lives involve us with young children. Another goal is to maintain a constant eye on the standards, the quality and the availability of the services offered to young children in our state. This also includes identifying some of the gaps in services needed by young children. We also want to help to identify some of the major problems that impinge upon the lives of young children, and develop positions as a State group on the proper priorities in our state in terms of the needs of young children. Another goal is to help develop a meaningful code of ethnics by which to strengthen, to support, and encourage our own resolution to work for the benefit of the young. Another goal is to foster very strong working relationships with all those other groups in the State who share our own concerns for young children. There are several active groups in our State like the Child Care Association, EKNE, ACE, and probably others we are not aware of. It is important to keep in mind that we, as groups, have much more in common than we have apart, and we need to develop the kind of strength that comes from coordinating and consolidating our efforts. We also want very clearly to focus our attention and activities in our State as our area of responsibility, as our sphere of

influence and our particular domain. In this connection I want to suggest that there may be some talented and visionary public servants in Springfield who want to introduce and support good legislation for young children. The chances are that they usually hear from people who want to resist progressive legislation! Perhaps we can be useful by supporting the efforts of such forwarding moving legislators by asking them how we can help them. So this broad outline gives you a general picture of the goals guiding the plans for the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children.

In terms of our future role, I want to share with you some hunches I have about strategies. It seems to me that the problems we have in Illinois in terms of early childhood education, day care and the preparation of teachers to work with young children are problems one would find elsewhere in our country. In fact, if I may digress, it seems to me that there really are no problems in education which are not also problems in other sectors of our society. Conflicts over goals, changing values, unimaginativeness, and a shortage of competent people, poor planning, competiveness, narrow-mindedness and mistrust mark all aspects of our social life.

One problem, it seems to me, is that our efforts on behalf of young children are so diffused and so scattered that we have seen virtually no impact. An enormous amount of money has already been spent in the last half a dozen years on young children, but it has been spread so thin, and has attempted to accomplish so many different goals, that on the whole the assessment of the effect of these programs and developments is discouraging. In fact, one of the things I heard during a recent visit to Washington was that Sesame Street had been so successful and so relatively simple that perhaps the solution to the early childhood problem might be to add another half-hour of programming rather than more classes and projects! Perhaps that is the logical reaction

of those who want to see instant "success" and "good results" in a hurry.

But it may be fair to say that early childhood education has not yet really been tried. The achievement of high quality programs for young children is extremely difficult. It is not just to provision of a building and a mixture of adults and children, equipment and materials. High quality programs involve many, many other things and we do not even know all of the dimensions of those things. Sometimes I get the impression, as I think about the various problems that nursery schools and day care centers have, that they are in some ways similar to old age homes. In both cases we are trying to provide services to clients who are relatively helpless; clients who cannot really get up and say, "I don't like what you are doing. I'm going down the street to Mrs. So and So's nursery school or old age home." They are among the most vulnerable people in the world. I do not know who speaks for the aged, but I do hope we speak for the young who really cannot speak for themselves.

Everyone quickly agrees that it is difficult to provide high quality services to young children. I think that among the things required for high quality are first of all, a very intensive kind of interacting and relating to children. (By the way, that is something that television cannot do). But by intensive interacting I mean face-to-face contact with the child; eye-to-eye contact with a child. Do you know how much instruction takes place from behind a child? So often we see adults in classes with young children leaning over them from behind them pointing out things that they should be doing or giving them things, even serving food to them this way. In fact, I have a hypothesis concerning the effects of preschool programs on children. Namely, that those children who are untouched by programs are those children in the group who have the least positive contact with the adults. Most of research on the effects of programs is reported in terms of averages or means for whole groups of children.

But what do we know about the individual children who "bring the scores down?" It is conceivable that those children who are most verbal, perhaps most intelligent, and most easy to get along with are getting an uneven share of the teacher's time, of the teacher's intensive interacting. But the point is that we cannot generate those kinds of intensive interactions with children when we are busy with other things. And it seems to be increasingly true that teachers and directors are asked to do more and more things that keep them away from interacting with children. There are all those forms to be filled out, bus schedules to be organized, and so on. They are important things, by the way, and have to be done by someone. There are other things also that drain our energy away from interacting directly and intensively with young children, such as having to resolve staff squabbles, and the conflicts that are so common among the adults who work together. Not the least of the conflicts occur between the teachers and the people they report to. These things take an enormous amount of energy. They are not unique to early childhood education programs. They can be seen everywhere in all our social organizations in universities, in industries and certainly in government.

Another aspect of high quality programs seems to me to be the difference between <u>knowing</u> a child and <u>knowing about</u> a child. In order to mean anything to a child in terms of his growth and development we need to <u>know</u> him, but in fact we are much better at knowing <u>about</u> him. You can know about children by collecting data on them. We know their ages, the number of immunizations, their weight, a good deal about their families, and their scores on tests. Teachers often tell me all sorts of facts about a child; about the fact that his father is gone, or perhaps that his mother is working, and so forth. But they often do not <u>know</u> the child himself. Knowing the child once again requires relating directly, in eye-to-eye fashion with the child each day. And you

cannot really develop quality relationships and services for young children unless you do know them in this way.

Another aspect of high quality programs, it seems to me, is that it requires of us a good deal of reflection on our day to day activities. We are all aware of how important it is to do planning for our programs. But I am not sure that that alone is as important as reflecting on what we have just done. Reflection takes time and that again cannot be done when our energy is drained away by all the other things that are increasingly required of people working in programs with young children.

Another point I want to emphasize here is that it seems to me that we have a chance to succeed and to realize our goals if we hold ourselves responsible for our own mistakes; if we ally ourselves with others who are responsible for the larger picture in other states, and if we join forces with them; when we do all we can to support their efforts. But ultimately it is the local effort that really counts! It is the quality of day to day encounters of individual adults with individual children that is really our responsibility. Which brings me to some important aspects of the role of our organization.

If you want to get an organization going, your best chance is to organize for opposition. It seems to be a general principle that it is easier to organize people for opposition than for anything else. It is far more difficult to organize a group for proposition, and I see this statewide group as that sort of group, as organized in order to propose. That is, in order to propose, in addition to ourselves, to propose to those who actions impinge upon us and the children. Generally, it is quite easy to recognize what we ought to propose to other people: We have been through that exercise already this morning in our earlier discussions and we have some strong

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notions about what to propose to the State officials. That is very easy. It is easy to give advice to others. But I now want to take advantage of this opportunity to emphasize and urge that we consider two somewhat alternative approaches to our role in the State. One, I think, is to propose to those around us that they do what we think is right; that we get in touch with the decision makers of various kinds and we tell them what we stand for, we tell them what is right, what is wrong, and what they ought to do. In effect, that we constitute a pressure group. That is one approach. Perhaps part of our work will be that.

But there is another approach that I am interest in. It has been coming to me slowly over the past few years, and permit me to share it with you. This approach is to be the finest possible example of what we believe in, and to perform our individual responsibilities, our individual roles in working with young children day to day, in the very best possible way. That is to say, that rather than constituting ourselves as a pressure group, to become instead an impressive group. What I think I have been watching lately is the large, large numbers of conflicting and increasing pressures being applied to all people in the leadership roles. These leaders include school principals, legislators, governors, and so forth. They are all being pressured and increasingly so. And after all that makes sense. But I am not sure there is any slack in the system to take up these excessive pressures. I do not want to be over alarmist, but I often wonder if this system could not easily burst, which by the way, will not help our children. At this point in my understanding of the way societies work, our children have nothing to gain from the disorganization of the system. So that I am suggesting that we clarify to ourselves how we are to use our energy. That we use it directly in the service of children in day to day living that we do with them. By means of this approach

we can achieve two of our goals simultaneously: provide high quality service to children, and thereby impressing those who should seek our counsel. Impressive high quality services to children at the local level should cause our position on the significant issues to be respected. The traditional pressure group approach distracts us from refining our skills and simply adds to the increasing surge of pressuring groups. By all means let us identify our allies who are in all sorts of positions and places. Let us joing forces with them, encourage them and support them while we continue to do our "thing." Our thing, it seems to me, is to assure each child in this State the fullest, deepest, and best quality of experience during those hours and days that we spend with him. The Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children was organized with that in mind. Let us know how we can help you to do that.